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Project: [Central Park](#)
Organization: [Madison Arts Commission](#)



“Terraced Cascade” is an environmental artwork and theater garden inspired by the marks that humans and water inscribe on the desert. Expressed as both miniature watershed and abstraction of the human torso, the artwork provides a means for people to imagine their place within the larger Indian Bend Wash—a watershed with extreme conditions of drought and flooding. A series of stepped, rib-like terraces and a vertebrae-like cascade are nestled into the hillside. The terraces are platforms for xeriscape plants and harvested water intermittently flows down the cascade to irrigate a mesquite bosque. This is an overview of the artwork showing stone walls, terraced planting beds, and the central cascade.

Environmentalism has long been part of Wisconsin’s ethos. In the 1960s, Wisconsin Governor Gaylord Nelson expanded the definition of environmentalism to include the active pursuit of solutions to environmental problems. After becoming senator, he was one of the principal founders of Earth Day. Yet, surprisingly, environmental art has not been prevalent in Madison, WI. This began to change after Karin Wolf, the arts program administrator of the City of Madison and Karen Crossley, director of the Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission, attended the 2009 Americans for the Arts conference entitled “Renewable Resources: Arts in Sustainable Communities.” Inspired by the possibilities of environmental art they asked the Madison community to consider the following: “What opportunities exist locally for creating and presenting environmental art? How can we best articulate and document public value? How do we nurture collaborations among non-traditional partners? Where do we start? How can we make something happen?”

At the same time, the City of Madison was commencing the design phase for a new Central Park located on a former brownfield six blocks east of the Capitol Square. A progressive residential neighborhood and a burgeoning “green business” district surround the park site. City officials, including Mark Olinger, Director of the Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development, and community members involved in

the park planning process were inspired by their conversations with local arts and cultural leaders. They decided the Central Park project would benefit from the integration of the work and ideas of an environmental artist in the process from the beginning of design development. When the City issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for Central Park, the City required the design team to include an artist. The successful team included the accomplished environmental artist Lorna Jordan who was attracted to the Central Park project because of its potential to become a “productive park” incorporating sustainable strategies, placemaking, and community energy. The selection panel was impressed with Lorna’s experience in re-imagining damaged sites as multidimensional, aesthetic places with enhanced ecological and social systems. They were also intrigued by her desire to draw upon sculpture, ecology, architecture, and theater to engage people in an aesthetic of regeneration.

Ms. Jordan’s projects often have functional aspects to them: they treat water, use recycled materials, generate energy, improve habitat, and incorporate drought-tolerant plantings. But beyond this, they are expressive and connect communities to the systems that sustain them. Communities are engaged, not as spectators, but as participants. Ms. Jordan is also interested in creating sculptural elements that embody movement and progressions of form. Within sites, these interact with the movements of people and processes to yield animated sequences. She is interested in places that immerse people in the changing nature of environments by expressing the performative aspect of social and ecological processes. People participate in these processes while playing a part in the vast performance of flows. Tapping into their memories and imaginations, they have experiences that range from the scientific and observable to the archetypal and sublime. She is well-tuned to the goals and ambitions of the Central Park project.

After the selection process was complete, the next step was to secure funding to support Ms. Jordan’s involvement. The City applied for and was awarded a grant through the NEA Mayors' Institute on City Design 25th Anniversary Initiative (MICD 25) to help fund Ms. Jordan’s design work. This has enabled the City to develop a new model for integrating environmental art into the core of its projects. Madison has been imagining the possibilities of neighborhood and economic revitalization for this part of Madison for almost 40 years. The City is now in a position to design, engineer, and build the new Central Park. And, as a result of the MICD 25 grant, environmental art will be front and center in the design process.

On early research trips, Ms. Jordan engaged the community and began the conversation. The videotaped community conversation and more information about the project, are available [here](#).

Organization Contact: [Karin Wolf](#)

http://ww3.artsusa.org/get_involved/membership/featured_members/2010/011.asp

Washington DC Office	New York City Office
1000 Vermont Avenue NW	One East 53rd Street
6th Floor	2nd Floor
Washington DC 20005	New York, NY 10022
T 202.371.2830	T 212.223.2787
F 202.371.0424	F 212.980.4857